

A SHORT STAY IN THE HOSPITAL

— for S.K. Morgan

Ellis was in the kitchen stirring the spaghetti sauce when the pain hit, deep and sharp, right in the middle of his chest. He hit the floor, knocking the pot of sauce over on his way down. It splattered on the oven door, the cabinets, the linoleum tile. Ruth heard the racket and came blasting out of the bathroom, hitching her black stretch pants up, a long sheet of toilet paper sticking up out of the waist in back like a long, flat, white tail. She nearly fainted. She thought he'd hemorrhaged or something, chunky blood all over the place.

She called an ambulance. They took him away. She'd never forgive him if he didn't pull through.

The doctor said, "It must have been a gas pain, Ruth. We hooked him up to an EKG. The man's got a heart like a draft mule."

"Is that so?" she said.

Ruth walked into Ellis' room and caught him chasing a busty, dirty-blonde, middle-aged nurse, who obviously wanted to be caught, around his bed. Ruth grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and the seat of her pants, dragged her out into the hall and sent her sliding along the shiny, buffed floor on her belly where she knocked the feet out from under an old guy with a walker, two physical therapists and a nurse with a lunch tray.

"STRIKE," yelled Ruth, jumping up, fist in the air. Then she remembered Ellis. She kicked the door in and dragged him out from under the bed. She said, "Follow me, Romeo. There's gonna be hell to pay when I get you home."

She dragged him down the hallway by his ear, his droopy white butt showing out the back of his hospital gown, her toilet paper tail, once she got moving, floating out behind her parallel to the ground, fluttering silently.

BREAKFAST AT CLETE AND JUANITA'S HOUSE

Ginger, Juanita's Chihuahua, pranced on the kitchen table.

"Come and give Mommy a kiss-kiss," said Juanita.

Ginger wagged her butt, stepped around a plate of buttered toast, and licked Juanita's pursed lips.

Think I'm gonna puke, thought Clete from behind his newspaper.

"Now go give Daddy a kiss-kiss," said Juanita.

Clete rustled his paper, "That dog just had a morning snack out of the cat box. She ain't kissin' me."

"Ginger does not snack out of the cat box," said Juanita indignant.

"What a low-life dog you've got, Juanita."

Ginger pranced expectantly in front of Clete's paper.

"She's better than that stupid cat of yours. Old What's-His-Name."

"Dave," said Clete.

Just then Ginger yelped. She had pranced one of her front legs into Clete's hot, black coffee. She jumped off the table and ran yipping, three-legged out of the kitchen. Clete watched her go, suppressing a giggle.

Dave watched from the window sill and smiled.

Juanita looked across the table and said, "Why didn't you just kiss her and get it over with?"

Clete wished he had. Juanita'd be in an ugly mood all day now.

SUMO

It was Sunday morning and Ellis was mad. The next door neighbors' dog (Ginger) had 'gone' on his lawn again. "I'm sick of that crap," he said to Ruth, on his way through the house to get the square-nosed shovel. "I'm gonna throw the whole load back up on their lawn. To hell with them." Ruth put down her T.V. Guide, "That is rude. I don't blame you honey."

Ellis walked back through the house, square-nosed shovel over his shoulder. Ruth followed behind for moral support. Ellis scooped and flung.

Ruth said, "Jeez, you'd think it was a Great Dane instead of a Chihuahua."